

THE COLONIA DE SANTA CRUZ OF 1926

By: J. P. Lundh

Galápagos had been the subject of much interest in Norway long before any Norwegians came to the islands. There had been the Compañía Colonizadora Suizo-Escandinava, which in the 1800s recruited a number of Norwegian settlers, but never got beyond the planning stage. Much later, the Norwegian bark *Alexandra*, which had been drifting helplessly for about three months, was abandoned on May 8, 1907, within sight of Floreana. This and the six-month ordeal on Santa Cruz of her master, Captain Emil Petersen, and half of his crew, kept the Norwegian press busy for some time.

In 1914, August F. Christensen returned from several years in Chile and the South Shetlands, where he had been supervising his family's whaling operations. He began writing a series of articles, mostly about the Galápagos, where he had obtained a concession to set up a whaling station on Floreana. Christensen continued promoting the islands as an ideal location for a Norwegian settlement well into the 1920s.

In the meantime, three young Norwegian journalists visited the Galápagos in 1922—Jens Aschehoug, Per Bang and Finn Støren. This also resulted in a series of articles extolling Galápagos. Støren later joined Christensen, Bang and Harry Randall in writing a book, which came out in 1926. Randall also organized a group of settlers, who arrived in San Cristóbal the same year.

Christensen had by then organized a company that set up a whaling station at Post Office Bay on August 10, 1925. The little stone-bordered paths, the concrete posts, and the slab that supported the steam-driven generator are the sad remains of this colony, which broke up the following year.

Captain Olaf Eilertsen had been involved with the Floreana project from the beginning, but had to stay in Norway because of illness. He had collected every bit of information he could get about the islands since the bark *Alexandra* had been abandoned. Early in 1926, he went ahead and formed his own group of settlers and decided to start a cannery on Santa Cruz. The Colonia de Santa Cruz arrived to uninhabited Academy Bay on August 7 on the three-masted schooner *Ulva*.

The Norwegians blasted a channel into the lagoon, where they built a stone landing that is still in use. About

forty meters inland from it, they built the cannery, seven dwellings (scattered around the area), a pipeline to the water hole in Pelican Bay, and a brick oven for baking. All this was done in the first few months, besides making ready the first shipment of canned lobster, mullet and turtle meat.

Two of the forty-five people from the *Ulva* were women, one of them Borghild Rorud, who was sent by the University of Oslo for collecting plants. *Acacia rorudiana* Christop. is named after her. The Floreana group had also a naturalist along, the zoologist Alf Wollebaek.

The *Ulva*, too large and expensive to maintain for the needs of the group, was sold to the Ecuadorian Navy, which renamed her *Patria*. Unfortunately, this also left the group at the mercy of the irregular and unreliable communications that then existed. This, the difficulty of getting spare parts for their two motor boats and the cannery, the gradual depletion of nearby resources, and increasing dissent within the group led to the collapse of the venture. In December 1927, very few people remained on the island. In the highlands, Elías Sánchez (who had lived there since 1917), Jacob and Anna Horneman (who had arrived that year), and Sigvart Tuset (from the *Alatga* group, which broke up in Panama); in Academy Bay, Kristian Stampa, Gordon Wold and Gunnar Larsen (the last another *Alatga* man).

It was not until the 1930s that a more stable and lasting Norwegian colony formed, mostly with the arrival of new people. A number of other Europeans also arrived, but the Ecuadorians were few at the beginning. The Norwegians remained in majority until 1938, when larger numbers of Ecuadorians began arriving.

SOURCES:

Aside from my own reminiscences, mostly from conversations with old settlers, the following have been consulted:

Harbitz, A. 1915. *Mandskapet fra bark Alexandra*. Steenske Bogtrykkeri og Forlag. Kristiania.

Hoff, S. 1985. *Drømmen om Galapagos*. Grøndahl and Søn Forlag. Oslo.

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